

[John Lamb]

Beliefs and Customs - [Cults?]

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview 19

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

JUN 19 [?]

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Frank Byrd

ADDRESS 224 W. 135th St.

DATE 5/25/39

SUBJECT Folklore

1. Date and time of interview

5/21/22/23

2. Place of interview

Father Divines Extension Kingdom, 123rd St. and Lenox Ave.

3. Name and address of informant

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Jewish Conciliation Court of America. John Lamb 123rd St. and Lenox Ave.

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Large apt. -office bldg. housing meeting and living rooms of Father Divine's

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

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NAME OF WORKER Frank Byrd

ADDRESS 224 W. 135th St.

DATE 5/25/39

SUBJECT Folklore

FATHER DIVINE AND HIS FOLLOWERS

Father Divine once said: "Emancipation is now open to those called Jews, by their accepting my message with the spirit of sincerity, forgetting their Adamic lineage and recognizing the Christ consciousness as the Redeemer and Savior. The persecuted and downtrodden Jews in this, as in the old era, are crying out in anguish for their Savior. I am

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the answer to that cry and prayer, offering them complete emancipation, if they will but hear my voice and obey.”

Not long after this public invitation, many persons of Jewish faith joined the Divine Movement. “Truly Wonderful”, the following treatise, is a story of one of these religious converts.

“Truly Wonderful”

No one would have objected, apparently, had she only attended one of Father Divine's meetings or even-[used?] 3 her highest intuition”, as the squat, diminutive little Negro evangelist and spiritual cult leader advised her to do. Publicly forsaking and denying the Jewish faith, however, was a horse of another color; at least, that was the opinion of certain leaders of the Hebrew Benevolent Society of which plump, readheaded redheaded Mrs. Sadie Bergenfeld (afterwards known as Thankful Purity) was a full fledged member. The society, in fact, felt so strongly about this matter that they called a meeting before the Jewish Conciliation Court of America for the sole purpose of giving the good lady the legal boot. In other words, they wanted to dispel her from their strictly orthodox society and deprive her of her rightful financial benefits that were due her after twenty years of monthly dues-paying. But Thankful Purity (nee' Bergenfeld) was not the type to give up without a fight, so she took the witness stand to testify [vehemently?] in her own behalf; her amber-green eyes flashing an indignant fire.

“Peace!” she began, with a decided Bronx accent. “It's wonderful!”

The three presiding judges were a little nonplussed by this strange procedure but bravely tried to carry on.

“Is it true that you belong to Father Divine's heaven?” one of them asked.

“Belong?” Thankful Purity asked, puzzled. “What means belong?”

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"Are you one of Father Divine's followers?" the judge amended.

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"I follow the best." was the answer he got. "Father Diane is wonderful. I like him. Peace!"

"How did you become an 'angel'?" another judge wanted to know.

"It happened two years ago," the witness explained eagerly. "I was feeling very, very bad. I saw hundreds of doctors and they all told me I must have an operation, but they refused to guarantee that I would get well. So one day I was sick in bed when a colored girl came in to clean my house. I told her I was sick and she said I should go to see Father cDivine Divine.

"I got up and went right away to one of his meeting rooms, and then I heard him speak. He was wonderful. He spoke of things I never heard of before; things I couldn't understand. I asked one of the women how I could speak to Father Divine and she told me to walk right up to him and say 'Peace!'"

"When the meeting was over, I rushed up to the platform, grabbed Father Divine's hand and cried: 'Peace!' I asked him what I must do to cure myself."

"What did he say?"

"He said: 'use your highest intuition!'"

"Did you?"

"I don't know. All I remember is that I went home and fell asleep. When I awoke in the morning, I was feeling fine. Since that day I have never been sick. Now I am sure Father Divine is God."

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"But," one of the judges protested, "This organization has a legal right to expel you. Their constitution says they can expel any member who leaves the Jewish faith. That is what you have done."

"I have not left the Jewish faith!"

Thankful Purity was very indignant in her denial

"I am now more of a Jew than the rest of you. I can shake hands with the whole world. I am not prejudiced. I love everyone. That is peace...heaven on earth. Don't you believe in peace[?]"

"Don't you think it would cause peace", judge number two inquired, "if you resigned from the society?"

"I want peace. The lodge doesn't want peace. Why should they take away all my benefits for which my husband paid for?"

"But you have violated the constitution by worshipping a different God."

"I am not worshipping a different God!" Thankful Purity shouted. "There is only one God, Father Divine. You don't know who God is. You don't know Father Divine."

"Well, what do you suggest that we do?" the Court finally asked.

After thinking it over for awhile Thankful Purity said: "I want peace. I'll give up everything. I don't want anything they were supposed to give me. They can have it. I don't [need?] anything. I've got heaven right here."

Without handing down any formal decision, the Court assured the society that Thankful Purity (that is, Mrs. Bergenfeld) 6 would resign from the organization.

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Thankful Purity, rising and walking from the room with aloof spiritual dignity and wearing an expression of glowing beatitude, stopped at the door and shouted a last-minute invitation in the direction of the judges, bench.

“Gentlemen,” she said, “I wish you would come to our meetings. You would learn something. Peace! It's truly wonderful!”